

Story 2023 (1998 Tape 1

Narrator: Ayla Demirtürk,
teacher, 28

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Acıpayam kaza,
Denizli Province

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Turkish Tourist Trade Refined

(This tale that I am going to tell you is a true account. It occurred not long ago. It concerns the recently developed alertness of Turkish peasants to some of the abuses in the tourist trade.

Just a short while ago a tourist was traveling through Turkey accompanied by an interpreter. He was visiting not only cities but also towns and villages, and so he was having a better opportunity to learn about our country than some other tourists do. But like many other tourists, his principal motive was to make money. Such tourists often paid peasants very low prices for antique objects and items of great historical interest, which they then took to their own countries and sold for much higher prices. These tourists were often very shrewd, but recently Turkish peasants who deal with such visitors have become equally shrewd.

This particular tourist that I shall tell you about was one day walking across the countryside with

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interpreter. When they came to a fountain, they stopped there to drink some water and rest briefly. Near the fountain an old donkey stood dozing, while its owner, a peasant, lay sleeping on the ground nearby. The tourist noticed almost at once that on the donkey's back was a very valuable antique kilim.¹ He thought, "My God, that is one of the rarest and most beautiful old kilims that I have ever seen! It is just the kind of thing that I am looking for. I must have that kilim!"

The tourist quickly thought of a scheme through which he could get that kilim cheaply. He said to himself, "I shall pretend to be interested in buying the donkey without saying anything about the kilim." Through his interpreter he asked the peasant, "Uncle, what are you doing with this donkey?"

"I am not doing anything with it," answered the peasant. "I am just resting here."

"If I should wish to buy this donkey, would you it to me?"

"What would you do with it?" the peasant asked

¹A flat woven carpet without pile. Although generally not as expensive as the tied (not woven) "Oriental" rugs of Turkey and Iran, kilims often bring surprisingly high prices.

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is very old, and it is not entirely healthy. It limps when it walks, and it must have mange, a kind of mange which itches, for it often rubs its sides against buildings and walls."

The tourist said, "Uncle, most of the children in my country have never seen a donkey. They do not even know what a donkey looks like. I wish to put this donkey in a zoo in my country.

The peasant responded, "My son, I doubt that this donkey has sufficient strength to travel all the way to your country."

"That is not really a problem, for I shall send him there by ship." He continued to urge the peasant to sell him the donkey.

"I think that I should not sell this animal to you. But I should warn you that even if I change my mind about this, the price would not be low."

The tourist said, "Tell me how much you want for it."

"I am asking 8,000 liras for it."²

²Determining the actual value of 8,000 Turkish liras would depend upon knowing the precise date of the transaction. In 1961 the U.S. dollar was equal in value to 9 liras. By the late 1990s, the dollar was worth more than 200,000 liras. Whatever the international value of 8,000 liras was in this tale, it was (judging from the context) a higher price than anticipated by the tourist.

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The tourist was very surprised at this figure. He knew that the real value of the donkey was not even 1,000 liras, but he also knew that the value of the antique kilim was considerably more than 8,000 liras. For the moment he could not decide what to do.

In the meantime the peasant said, "I am aware that this donkey is not worth more than 1,000 liras, but I am asking 8,000 for it because I really do not wish to sell it to you."

The tourist pretended to be thinking about this matter for a minute, and then he said, "All right, uncle I shall pay 8,000 liras for the donkey." He then counted out that much money into the peasant's hand.

The peasant took the money with one hand, and with his other hand he removed the kilim from the donkey's back and put it down beside him. "Take the animal. It is yours now," he said.

The tourist could not quite believe what had happened. What had he expected? What could he do about it now? He seemed completely confused, starting to walk away but then turning back. He said, "Uncle, you have beside you a worn and dirty piece of a kilim. Would you mind covering the old donkey with it to keep it from becoming cold?"

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The peasant asked, "My son, who do you think you are? Do you imagine that you are a very clever person? I have already sold this donkey more than ten times because of that kilim. Do you suppose that any tourist would wish to buy my donkey for itself? But we bargained for only donkey. Since you will not take it home with you, please leave it close enough to this fountain so that I can recover it easily. Other tourists will come to buy it, just as you did, and I shall sell it to them too!"

(This is a true story which reveals how alert Turkish peasants have become to benefiting from the tourist trade.